

The morning sun began to rise, casting a gentle glow over the world. Early morning birds had already started chirping, their songs a stark contrast to the tension that filled the air. People could be seen returning home after a long night, but this was no ordinary dawn. It was the dawn of a new year. Tiny rays of sunlight pierced through the thick clouds, illuminating the streets below. One of those rays found its way to a home in the suburbs.

Inside that house, the light fell upon the face of a man lying on the bed. Beside him, a woman sat, holding his hand, tears streaming down her face. Opposite them, standing in front of the door, were three figures. The atmosphere was thick with tension. It's funny how one simple sentence can silence an entire room full of people. Then, just as suddenly, the silence was broken.



"What in the actual hell is going on, Ahnaf???" Ruvana, sitting on the edge of the bed, asked in a hoarse voice, extremely furious.

This is Ahnaf's home. Standing beside him near the door are Kelly and me, Eric.

"Look, Mom... I... I can... explain!" Ahnaf replied.

"Explain!? You've got a lot of explaining to do now, young man!!"

"Please, both of you. Stop!" The man lying on the bed spoke out. It was Mid-Nite, now unmasked and wounded.

All of us looked at him. I didn't know who he was, neither did Kelly, aside from Ruvana. And speaking of what he said earlier, he seemed to be Ahnaf's father, who was said to have abandoned him when he was born. But here he was, the same man who showed Ahnaf and me the ropes, taught us how to use our powers. Mid-Nite, now revealed to be Ahnaf's lost father.

"But... But Zain, how did you...? How... how are you alive, and what... were you doing with Ahnaf and his friends? What is all this blood!? Answer me, please???" Ruvana's voice trembled with a mix of anger and confusion.

"Alright, calm down... just calm down..." Mid-Nite, who was Zain all along, answered.

He looked at all of us and gestured for us to take a seat. We obliged and sat on the nearby chairs, eagerly awaiting answers to everything, from his life in the Heartlands to the position he was in now. He took a deep breath and began.

"Hello everyone, most of you... err, I mean all of you except for Ruvana, haha..." He chuckled slightly, trying to lighten the mood, but none of us blinked an eye.

"Alright, alright, I am Zain, Ahnaf's father and Mid-Nite... and a former member of the Heartlands. Now, I know you all have a lot of

questions, so let me cut to the chase. To tell you everything, let me start from the very beginning..."

He paused for a moment, then added with a wry smile, "But first, can someone get me a glass of water? I feel like I've been talking for hours already!"

The tension in the room eased slightly as we exchanged glances. Kelly got up to fetch the water, and Zain continued, "You know, it's funny. I always thought my big reveal would be more dramatic, like in the movies. But here we are, in a cozy little room, with me looking like I just went through a meat grinder."

We couldn't help but crack a small smile at his attempt to lighten the atmosphere. Zain took the glass of water from Kelly and took a sip before continuing, "Alright, let's get serious. Here's the story you've all been waiting for..."



It was the year 1998..... My business was thriving. I owned a pawn shop, where people brought in their old, seemingly worthless items, and I turned them into treasures for the highest bidder.

One day, a bald man walked in and offered me a business proposal that I couldn't refuse. Everyone wants more in life, right? He offered me £30,000, but in return, he wanted me to sell something. He handed me a brown package, which I suspected contained drugs. The payoff was too high to resist, so I accepted. He told me that someone would come to pick it up the next day. He left half of the money in a suitcase and departed. As it was late at night, I placed

both the money and the package in my most secure locker before heading home.

I went to bed, but a phone call woke me up in the middle of the night. It was the police, informing me that my pawn shop was on fire and that I needed to come immediately. When I arrived, I was shocked. The shop was reduced to dust and ashes, the wooden door burnt, and smoke filled the air. My heart raced as if it was going to burst. As the dust settled, I answered a few questions from the police and insisted on going home. I knew what had happened. I had lost both the money and the package. If the bald man found out, my family and I were done for.

I rushed home, only to be even more shocked to see men in grey coats entering my house. I went inside and saw my wife, Ruvana, at gunpoint. I was helpless. And that's when the bald man showed up. He gave me three options...



Pay him 50,000 pounds

Watch him kill my wife Infront of me

Work for him for the next 15 years

He paused, the weight of his words hanging in the air. "Maybe I could have sold the house and taken loans, but I couldn't let my only family go homeless and sink into even more debt. So that's when I chose... chose to join them. At the very least, I knew you and Ruvana would be alive and well. But they restricted me from meeting with Ruvana until the 15 years were over.

Next in the year 2000. something extraordinary happened. A space shuttle crash-landed in the nearby fields. I immediately took off with The Boss to investigate. The spacecraft was spherical in shape and looked undeniably alien. We took a quick look around it, but it appeared empty from the outside. We didn't have much time to take a closer look as the sound of police sirens grew louder in the distance.

As we were leaving, I noticed fresh car tracks down the road. They looked eerily familiar, like the tire tracks from my old car. I didn't mention this to The Boss, of course. But what really caught my attention was a very tall figure standing in the distance of the woods, staring straight at me. I pointed it out to everyone, but by the time they turned around, the figure had vanished.

We left the scene quickly as the cops started closing in, but the encounter left me with more questions than answers.



Then in the year 2001. things took a strange turn. The Boss's attitude towards me changed drastically. He started taking me to different fighting schools, insisting that I learn various martial arts. He even taught me programming, saying something about being strong enough to survive the harshest of falls. He wanted me to become their main muscle. I don't know what he saw in me at that time, but it was his mistake.

His decision gave me free reign over most of their hideouts and everything they had to offer. I had access to all their crime

documentation, every location of their hideouts, every piece of evidence I needed to put them all behind bars. I had it all.

With this newfound access, I had but one motive: to burn the Heartlands to the ground once I had everything I needed. I knew it wouldn't be easy, but I was determined to bring them down from the inside. Every piece of information I gathered brought me one step closer to my goal. The more I learned, the more I realized the extent of their operations and the danger they posed.

I trained hard, honing my skills and biding my time. I knew that one wrong move could expose me, but I was willing to take that risk. The thought of finally being free from their grasp and protecting my family kept me going. I was ready to do whatever it took to see the Heartlands fall.



Then came 2005. It was a stormy evening, and I had everything collected. All the proof and data of the Heartlands. The Boss was out, and I had disabled every security measure in the place, thanks to everything he had taught me. I had every document, but I still needed the data from the Boss's computer. Confident in my abilities, I overrode his computer security, thinking I could outsmart the teacher. But I was wrong.

As I placed the pen drive into the slot, a security alarm started ringing. He had a hardware lock that only allowed specific USB sticks to work. Panic set in, and I knew I had to run. Grabbing all the

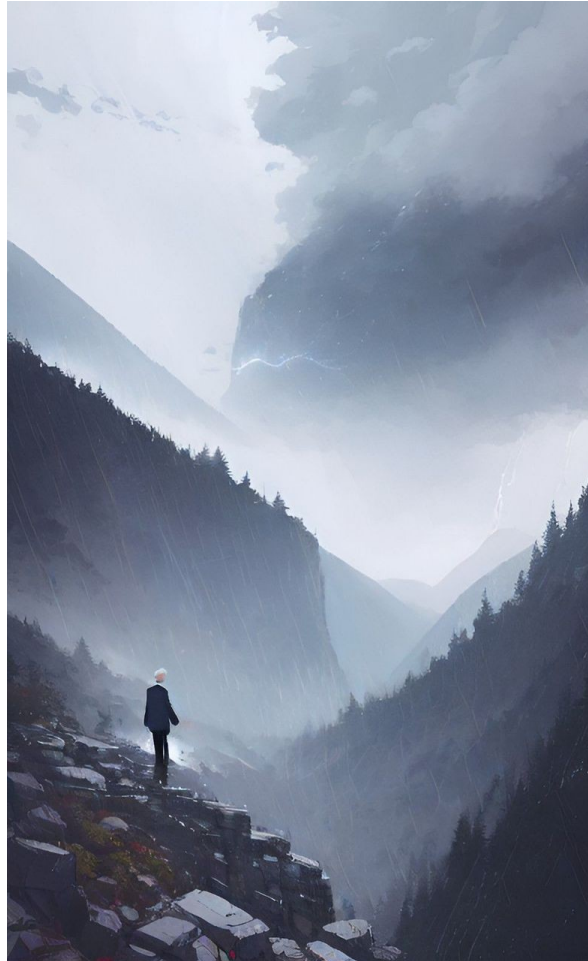
documents I had, I bolted out of there. The rain was pouring down, and cars were already chasing me. I rode my bike towards the south, hoping to lose them down the mountain trail.

But then, I felt a sharp pain in my side. I had been shot. I fell off my bike, the documents scattering around me. Bleeding from my waist, I pushed myself to keep running, but I couldn't shake them. I found myself at the edge of a hill, facing my doom. The Boss stood in front of me, surrounded by his men. It really was the harshest of falls.

I wasn't afraid to die, but I was terrified of what they would do to my family. What I did was reckless, but I did it because no one else would. As I stood there, my phone pinged. I reached into my pocket, but before I could read the message, I was shot again, and I fell.

In that brief moment before everything went dark, I saw the text. It was from The Boss. It said, 'Your family will be safe.'

The words echoed in my mind as I lost consciousness. I had risked everything, and now, at the brink of death, I could only hope that my sacrifice would be enough to protect the ones I loved.



But that was not the end, I fell, and I fell hard. I could feel my bones breaking with every rock I crashed into, some piercing my flesh and muscle until I was left with nothing but a broken body as I reached the ground. The pain was unbearable, and I knew I was on the brink of death.

As I lay there, taking what I thought would be my last breath, I saw a red light. A man wearing what seemed to be a robe, his hands glowing red, was coming towards me. I couldn't make out his face, but there was something otherworldly about him. And then... everything went blank." seemed to be a robe, his hands glowing red,

was coming towards me. I couldn't make out his face, but there was something otherworldly about him. And then... everything went blank.

It was the year 2008. *My eyes slowly opened, and I found myself in a rocky area with a small pond of water in the middle. My entire body was covered in bandages, and I couldn't move. The air was chilly, and in the distance, I saw a man wearing a violet robe sitting in front of a fire.*

Upon seeing me awake, he started walking towards me. Every part of my body hurt, and I couldn't move. I screamed, asking who he was, but he did not answer. He stood next to me, looking almost the same age as me, in his early 30s, with a height of about 6 feet and a small beard on his chin.

I still remember the conversation vividly.



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'You don't need to know who I am, but just know that I saved your life... And you are in the Alps right now, if you were wondering.'

'You take me for a fool? Nobody does this for nothing! What is your goal?'

'Let's just say that I need you for something much later... something that only you can do.'

'And what is that thing?'

'All will be told in due time, but for now, you need to rise for that to even occur.'

'AAAGGHH!!! Crap, it hurts every time I move! How long have I been like this?'

'Not much... 3 years.'

'Three years!!! How is that possible? Without a hospital or doctor?'

'Let's just say it is hard to bring back people who have passed away... got to trap their soul as soon as it leaves the body, else they are lost to the void, and they aren't themselves when they come back. The entire process is very... difficult, so I had to be careful.'

'Haha, that's funny. I thought I would give a laugh, but why the hell did you not fix my body with that voodoo crap of yours!!!??? Huh?'

'Because I healed what your body could not. Now it is time for your body to heal itself when it can.'

'I am done with your speech! Now tell me... what's the catch?'

'If I had to give you a simple answer... A war is coming, and you just might have a vital role in it.'

Now it is 2012. Years went by, four long years, and in all that time, all I did was learn. I learned to walk, to run, to bring myself back to a semblance of normal life. And, of course, I learned to fight. I couldn't forgive the Heartlands for what they had done to me. They took away my normal life, separated me from my family, and ruined everything I held dear. I didn't even know if my family was still alive.

I tried to leave many times, but there was an energy barrier around the place that kept me trapped. The man in the violet robe, the Healer, trained me relentlessly. He pushed me to get better, to be better. He taught me the use of various weapons, but I favored the baton. That's where I learned to wield it with precision and skill.

Then, one day, everything changed. The Healer removed the barrier surrounding us and left in a hurry. He told me to get back to civilization, saying I was now ready. Not that he needed to tell me-I had been ready for a while. And so, I left, wandering around like a

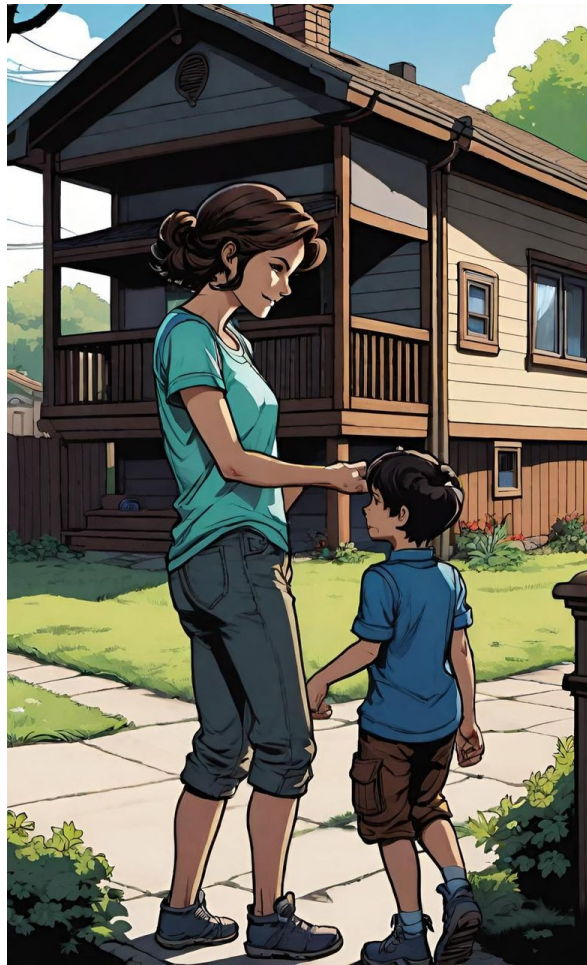
hippie, trying to find my place in a world that had moved on without me.

The journey was long and arduous, but I was determined. I had a purpose, a mission to bring down the Heartlands and reclaim my life. The training, the pain, the isolation-it had all led to this moment. I was ready to face whatever came next, armed with the skills and knowledge I had gained over those four years.



The year is 2013. *I have finally reached Leeds. The entire world has changed quite a lot. My programming skills landed me a job at a*

small video game company, but the computers and programming are vastly different now. I used all the money I got to learn more programming courses just so I would be able to create a fraudulent ID so I can get on with my life. I even checked up on my house, it was still there and Ruvana, she was just as I left her... Beautiful as ever, but I did not risk meeting her.



Then comes 2014. This was the preparation phase for me. I had finally sorted out my life, and now it was time for my revenge. I didn't meet with Ruvana, as it would endanger her. Instead, I bought

an old, abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of town. It was the perfect place to set up my operations without drawing attention.

The warehouse was in a state of disrepair, but that suited my needs perfectly. I spent weeks cleaning it up, reinforcing the walls, and setting up a secure perimeter. I installed state-of-the-art security systems, including cameras, motion sensors, and encrypted communication lines. This place would be my fortress, my command center.

I started collecting and creating all the tools I would need for my mission. I built a small armory, stocked with weapons and gadgets I had learned to use over the years. Batons, knives, and even some custom-made devices designed for stealth and efficiency. I also set up a workshop where I could modify and repair my gear.

My programming skills came in handy as I hacked into various databases, gathering information on the Heartlands' operations, their members, and their hideouts. I created detailed maps and plans, outlining every step of my mission. I knew that one wrong move could cost me everything, so I left nothing to chance.

I trained rigorously, pushing my body to its limits. I practiced combat techniques, honed my reflexes, and built up my endurance. I knew that the Heartlands wouldn't go down without a fight, and I had to be ready for anything.

I also kept a close eye on Ruvana from a distance, making sure she was safe. It pained me not to be with her, but I knew that my mission was the only way to ensure her safety in the long run.

As the months went by, my plan took shape. I identified key targets within the Heartlands, pinpointed their weaknesses, and devised strategies to exploit them. I knew that taking down such a powerful organization wouldn't be easy, but I was determined to see it through.

It's finally 2015. *I started to stalk all the old hideouts of the Heartlands, moving like a shadow, gathering information on their new hideouts and crime spots. I watched their every move, learning their routines and identifying key players. I needed everything planned out perfectly before I could act. But no matter how many times I stalked them, The Boss was nowhere to be found. It was as if he had vanished into thin air.*

I knew that finding The Boss was crucial to my mission. He was the key to bringing down the entire organization. Maybe once I started taking action, I would be able to draw him out. But for now, I had to be patient and meticulous. Every piece of information I gathered brought me one step closer to my goal.

The nights were long and filled with tension as I followed them from the shadows. I couldn't afford to make any mistakes. One wrong move, and everything I had worked for would be lost. But I was

determined. The Heartlands had taken so much from me, and I was ready to take it all back.

As I continued my surveillance, I began to notice patterns and weaknesses in their operations. I knew that when the time came, I would be ready to strike. The Boss might be elusive, but he couldn't hide forever. And when I found him, I would make sure he paid for everything he had done.



Now comes 2016 and 2017. *I raided every base, destroyed hideouts, and even checked upon the old headquarters during these*

two years. But The Boss was nowhere to be found, and the Heartlands, under his influence, kept growing despite the setbacks I inflicted. It was frustrating, but I couldn't give up.

I kept a small check on Ruvana as well. I was happy to see her well and good. However, I noticed a bald man visiting her house sometimes. He looked almost like The Boss, but I dismissed the thought, believing he was too smart to risk getting caught. I thought I'd check up on him later, but little did I know that it was my greatest mistake.

The raids and destruction I caused were only temporary setbacks for the Heartlands. They always seemed to bounce back, stronger and more elusive than before. My frustration grew, but so did my determination. I knew I had to find The Boss and put an end to his reign once and for all.

As I continued my mission, the presence of the bald man nagged at the back of my mind. Something about him felt off, but I was too focused on my immediate goals to investigate further. It was a decision that would come back to haunt me.

And then you know the rest, isn't it? The Heartlands, in their desperate bid to consolidate power, began taking unprecedented risks. They started targeting local gangs, attempting to absorb them into their ranks or eliminate them entirely. This aggressive expansion created chaos in the city, and and that's where Our paths

crossed, that's how we came to be in the situation we are now, haha?"

The room was filled with a heavy silence, the weight of the revelation sinking in. We were all dumbfounded, unable to process the magnitude of what we had just learned. Ahnaf stood there, tears welling up in his eyes, his emotions raw and unguarded. Kelly, sensing his vulnerability, wrapped her arms around him, holding him tightly as if to shield him from the pain.

On the other side of the room, Ruvana was equally affected. She clung to Zain's hand, her tears flowing freely, unable to contain the overwhelming sorrow. Zain, though visibly shaken, tried to offer her some comfort, his grip on her hand firm and reassuring.



The tension in the room was palpable. "Now now, don't cry Ruvana, I'm back here, see... I am in no position to-" Zain began, trying to calm her down.

"SHUT UP!!!" Ruvana screamed, her voice filled with anguish. "YOU!!! You tried acting all high and mighty... You tried to be a hero, huh? And look what happened... You... You almost died... not once but twice... And you have the gall to come and laugh as if nothing has happened!!!"

"Mom... mom, stop... He did all he could to... to protect us!" Ahnaf protested, his voice trembling with emotion.

"No... his greed, his wants, his needs got us where we are now! All this time, it was all about him... And you, young man!!! You are in far worse trouble. You hid things from me, lied to me along with all your friends about the things that you were doing." Her movements slowed down as she started to feel dizzy.

"You... Ahnaf, you are... yo-" Ruvana suddenly slid down the bed and fainted.

Ahnaf and Zain rushed to her side, their panic evident. They gently lifted her and laid her back on the bed. Zain, clutching his waist, slowly moved towards the living room and sat on the sofa. I joined him, my ankle still throbbing from the gunshot wound. Surprisingly, it had partly healed, thanks to my fast metabolism. Good for me, as I wasn't ready to explain a gunshot wound to my mom.

The room was filled with a heavy silence, the weight of the recent events pressing down on all of us.

"Guess the cat is out of the box huh" Zain exclaimed.



"I... I guess... There is no going back from this," I replied, the weight of the situation sinking in.

"At least we got the docu-" Zain began, but then his eyes widened in panic. "Where are the documents?"

"They should be here. I placed them on the... living room table... but they're not here," I said, my voice trembling.

"DAMN IT!!!!.. All these years were for... nothing!!! That cowardly rat stole it while no one was looking!!!!" Zain's frustration was palpable.

Suddenly, the landline rang, breaking the tense silence. Ahnaf sat there, looking blank, lost in his thoughts. I decided to move ahead and answer the call. I picked up the receiver, my heart pounding.

"Hello... Sohail's residence," I said, trying to keep my voice steady.

"Hello there, Eric..." The voice on the other end sent a chill down my spine. It was Ramsey.

"You!!! You piece of-" I started, but Zain quickly grabbed the phone from me.

"CRAP!!! How dare you! Called us to mock us, is it??? Think you have won!!! We are gonna fi-"



"Now now, Zain, please do you think that I'll be that irrational? Don't worry, I am not running off anywhere... but I am going to say that don't come looking for me... If you want to face me... Oh my bad... Neither you nor that speedy brat is in any condition to face me... So, if Ahnaf wants to face me... feel free to come to Steady Acres and we will end it... On 10th January."

"Oh, I'll come alri-" Just as Zain was about to finish, the call ended abruptly.

"What... happened???" I asked, confusion evident in my voice.

"Steady Acres, it's their farmhouse... they want us to meet there," Zain replied, his voice tense.

"Us? I am in no shape to run; you are in no shape to walk... All this... is your doing!!! I've told you time and time again that it is a trap, but no... not this time, none of u-"

"I'll go," Ahnaf finally broke his silence, his voice resolute.

"But Ahnaf-" I started to protest.

"There is no but... that person... ruined my family. Took away my father from me... I am going to end him!!!" Ahnaf's determination was palpable.

"Try to understand... there is no knowing what he would do. He planned this all out up until now, I am sure of it!" I exclaimed, my concern growing.

"And? What will he do to stop me? Nothing... you know why? Because he can't... he hurt you, you can't walk for days... He hurt Mid-Nite, now he'll be lucky to even stand straight. But me? He can't hurt me... I AM IMMORTAL!!! I cannot be wounded and that would be his end!" Ahnaf's voice was filled with unwavering conviction.



I answered, "Maybe you are Immortal, but... are you Invincible?"

Ahnaf's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean!?"

"Bullets make you bleed; grenades toss you around like a ragdoll; Hell, I think even stun guns could electrify you and put you out of commission for God knows how long until you start healing again. Just because you heal faster than us doesn't make you any better than us! You are nothing without us covering for you!!!"

Ahnaaf's face twisted in fury. He grabbed me by the collar and slammed me against the nearby wall. "What did you say to me!" he screamed, his voice echoing through the room.

"Ahnaaf! Please let him go... This is not you... calm down, please," Kelly pleaded, her eyes wide with fear.

"Leave him be, Kelly. He doesn't need us, right? Well then, come on... punch me!!!" I challenged, my voice steady despite the fear coursing through me.

"Kids... enough teenage drama for now," Zain interjected, moving closer to us. "Come on, Ahnaaf, leave him be."

Ahnaaf's grip tightened for a moment before he shoved Zain away, sending him crashing into the sofa. The room was filled with a tense silence, everyone on edge.

"WOULD YOU GUYS SHUT UP ALREADY!!!" Ruvana's voice cut through the tension like a knife. She stood outside her room, her face pale but determined.



She slowly stepped towards us, her presence commanding the room. Seeing her approach, Ahnaf released his grip on my collar and moved back near the sofa. I took a moment to adjust my suit before heading upstairs to change into some of Ahnaf's old outfits. When I returned, they were all sitting on the sofa, the tension still lingering in the air.

"I'm sorry, Miss Ruvana, for the trouble. I'll leave you all be. Kelly, are you coming?" I asked, my voice steady but filled with regret.

Kelly stood up and walked towards me, her steps hesitant. "Yes... I... I think I should go... I'm... sorry, Ahnaf and Ms. Ruvana," she said, her voice trembling with emotion.

As I opened the door, I was greeted by the harsh rays of the sun, daylight streaming in. I took a deep breath, feeling the weight of the situation pressing down on me. Before leaving, I turned back to Ahnaf one last time.

"And Ahnaf... I won't be saying anything from now... Do what you want," I stated, my voice firm but filled with a mix of resignation and determination.

With that, Kelly and I stepped out into the bright sunlight, leaving behind the heavy atmosphere of the room.



As I was leaving, my mind was racing with the revelations that had just unfolded. Who could have imagined that Ahnaf, of all people, would have such a complex history? Despite everything we had learned, there were still so many unanswered questions:

What was in that strange space object? The mystery of its origin and purpose still lingered, leaving us with more questions than answers.

Why were Zain's old car tracks near the object? The connection between Zain and the object was puzzling, hinting at a deeper involvement that we had yet to uncover.

Who exactly is Khan? This enigmatic figure remained shrouded in mystery, his true intentions and identity still unknown.

And most importantly, if Mr. Zain was not allowed to meet Ms. Ruvana since 1998, how was Ahnaf conceived in 2000? This question struck at the heart of the matter, challenging everything we thought we knew about their past.

On the other side, Ahnaf, Ruvana, and Zain sat together on the sofa in their living room, the weight of the recent revelations hanging heavily in the air.

"So... these powers... how and when did you receive them?" Ruvana asked, her voice soft but filled with concern.

Ahnaf looked down, his voice barely above a whisper. "I... I don't know... I guess since I got shot."

"So, you've been hiding this from me since September?" Ruvana's tone was gentle, but the hurt was evident.

"Yes... I did not want you to be worried, Mom," Ahnaf admitted, his eyes filled with guilt.

Ruvana turned her gaze to Zain, her eyes filled with a mix of anger and sorrow. "And you... Zain... How could you, putting your own son in danger?"

"My son??? Oh... oh, right, my son... I didn't even know up until recently!" Zain's voice was defensive, but there was a hint of regret.

"So, you know, put anybody's kid in danger just to achieve your own goal, is it?" Ruvana's voice trembled with emotion.

"If that means seeing my family again..." Zain's voice softened, his eyes pleading.

"Very funny way of showing it," Ruvana retorted, her voice laced with bitterness.

"What else should I have done, Ruvana??? I had no other choice!" Zain's frustration was palpable.

"Oh, I don't know... maybe you could have stayed there for 15 years!!! And left by the year 2013," Ruvana's voice cracked, tears welling up in her eyes.

"You don't know anything, Ruvana. You don't know the lengths I have gone for them, the amount of innocent people I have killed in a heartbeat-" Zain's voice broke, his pain evident.

"So what? You wanted to jeopardize our family's survival just because you wanted to be a hero???" Ruvana leaned in towards Zain, her fists pounding against his arms in a desperate attempt to release her anguish.

Zain, his own emotions boiling over, forcefully leaned in close and held Ruvana, his grip firm but gentle. "No! Because I wanted to see you again!!!" His voice was filled with a raw, aching love.

Ruvana's resistance melted away, her tears flowing freely as she buried her face in Zain's chest. "I... I missed you so much," she whispered, her voice muffled by his embrace.

"I missed you too, Ruvana. Every single day," Zain replied, his voice choked with emotion.



Both with tears in their eyes, Ruvana and Zain leaned closer and closer to each other. They had longed to see and be with each other for so long but couldn't due to circumstances. They loved each other deeply, but neither wanted to express it, fearing it would show a sign of weakness. But now, being this close to one another, they forgot the world around them.

"I should go..." Ahnaf stood up and went upstairs to his room, leaving his mom and dad alone with each other.

The time was 7 o'clock in the evening, and the weather had started cooling down. Ahnaf sat on his chair, playing computer games with his headphones on. He didn't want to hear any strange noises coming from below. As he sat there, someone from behind wrapped their arms around him and hugged him softly. It was Ruvana. Ahnaf placed his hand on hers.

"Ah, Mom! You scared me..." He looked back, smiling.

"Oh, now the strong superhero son of mine is scared of these tiny hands?" she teased.

"He... hey, stop," Ahnaf laughed.

"Come downstairs... supper is ready," Ruvana said gently.

Ahnaf nodded, feeling a warmth in his heart. Despite everything, they were still a family.

Ahnaф obliged and went downstairs with her. There at the dining table Zain is sitting with soup in hand. Upon looking at me, Zain waved his hand.

"Hey kid, come down here," Zain called out.

"Sure thing... Dad?" Ahnaф responded, a hint of hesitation in his voice.

"Haha, now you can say all you want, no need to be shy," Zain replied with a warm smile.

Ahnaф took a seat at the table and started sipping the soup his mom had made. They began reminiscing about his childhood, sharing stories of everything that happened while Zain wasn't around.

"Do you remember the time you tried to build a treehouse all by yourself?" Ruvana asked, a playful smile on her face.

Ahnaф chuckled, "Yeah, I remember. It was a disaster. The whole thing collapsed before I even got halfway."

Ruvana laughed, "You were so determined, though. You spent the entire weekend trying to fix it. I had to call the neighbor to help you out."

Zain joined in, "I wish I could have been there to see that. Sounds like quite the adventure."

Ruvana's eyes sparkled with nostalgia, "And then there was the time you decided to adopt every stray animal you found. Our house was like a mini zoo for a while."

Ahnaf blushed, "I just couldn't stand seeing them out there alone."

Ruvana continued, "And speaking of animals, do you remember the first time I found out about Kelly?"

Ahnaf's face turned even redder, "Mom, do we have to talk about that?"

Ruvana laughed, "Oh, come on, it's a sweet story. You were so nervous about introducing her to me. I remember you pacing back and forth in the living room, rehearsing what you were going to say."

Zain grinned, "Sounds like young love."

Ruvana nodded, "When you finally brought her over, you were so worried about what I would think. But Kelly was so sweet and polite. I could see why you liked her so much."

Ahnaf smiled, "Yeah, she's pretty amazing."

The conversation flowed easily, filled with laughter and fond memories. Everything seemed so perfect, like his life was finally taking the right path. He had his mom, his dad, and the love and

support of his family. All he needed to do now was destroy the Heartlands and protect those he cared about.



"Mom and... Dad, this is the first time I'm having a meal with family. There are so many more things I want to do with you guys, but... none of us can rest easy until the Heartlands are gone. They will keep coming," Ahnaf said, his voice filled with determination.

"We know that... but we can't let you fight it," Ruvana stated, her voice trembling with concern.

"I'm sorry, but this is not up for debate. I am going on 10th January to Steady Acres to end it all," Ahnaf replied firmly.

"Ahnaf, you are my son... I lost Zain once, and I don't want to lose you now. Please, listen to your dad," Ruvana pleaded, her eyes filled with tears.

Zain placed a comforting hand on Ruvana's shoulder



"Look, you don't know The Boss... He has everything planned. If he wants you to be there, he already might have a countermeasure

ready for you. He was your doctor, right? He must have discovered your weakness long ago," Zain stated, his voice filled with concern.

"I have no weakness! Come on... I have strength like The Sentinel, and I heal easily from the gravest of wounds," Ahnaf retorted, his confidence unwavering.

"Sentinel??? Come on, don't make me laugh... if you had strength like The Sentinel, then it would have been no problem. But the way you are right now... it is not possible. He is prepared, you are not," Zain replied, his voice firm.

"You can't change my... mind... I am going, whether you like it or not," Ahnaf said, placing his hand on his head.

"That is where you are wrong... you are... NOT," Ruvana said, moving closer to Ahnaf.

"Wha... what is this... why am I feeling dizzy... what was in the soup?" Ahnaf stood up, feeling tipsy and unable to balance himself properly.

"My boy, Ahnaf... I am sorry, but this is the only way. A sedative was in the soup. And unfortunately, you will keep on getting it for the next 10 days until 10th January. You don't know The Boss... He has everything planned out, and he wants you to be there for something. But don't worry... Dad will take care of the Heartlands like I promised myself years ago. It is time for Mid-Nite's last ride," Zain said, walking closer to Ahnaf, trying to grab him.

Ahnaf's vision blurred as he struggled to stay conscious. "No... you can't... do this..." he mumbled, his strength fading.

Ruvana's eyes filled with tears as she watched her son succumb to the sedative. "We love you, Ahnaf. We can't lose you," she whispered, her voice breaking.

Zain gently caught Ahnaf as he collapsed, holding him close. "Rest now, my son. We'll handle this. We'll protect you," he said softly, his voice filled with determination.



Ahnaf's eyes started to close as he struggled to keep his balance. The world around him began to blur and spin. In that moment, his thoughts raced:

'Why... why would my family, the people I trust the most, do this to me? I thought after a long time everything was normal again... but... but I was wrong. I... I can't fall asleep... If I do, everyone will perish... only I can save them... only me... What is Mid-Nite gonna do? He is not strong enough. He... will die. If that happens, I am afraid, but.... '

As the sedative took hold, Ahnaf's vision darkened, and he felt himself slipping away. His last conscious thought was a desperate plea to stay awake, to protect his family, to be the hero they needed. But the darkness was relentless, and soon, he was lost to it.

I will never be whole again...